

# PATHWAY THREE: TRANSITIONS

There are reasons why the Ready Schools program is not called Ready Children. Part of the main focus of the Transitions Pathway is to work on changing the mindset from getting children ready for school to getting the school ready for all children. This includes connecting with early childhood professionals, discovering the needs of families in the community (as discussed in the Family, School, and Community Partnerships Pathway), and collaborating to ensure successful transitions for all children, to PreK, from PreK to K, grade to grade, school to school, and in and out of services. Inherent in this Pathway is the importance of aligning environments, curriculum, standards, programs, and practices across settings.



## Key Understandings

There are several principles that underlie the transition-focused work of the Ready Schools Community-District Teams:

- ▶ All children come to school with the ability and readiness to learn.
- ▶ Equal focus should be placed on transitioning children and transitioning schools and services to meet the needs of children and families.
- ▶ Transitions occur at several levels for children. The first transition occurs from home to a care setting, PreK, or K. However, plans need to be in place for transitions as children move between grades, schools, and services.
- ▶ A seamless continuum of learning experiences for children across ages, settings, programs, and grades helps make transitions smoother.
- ▶ Families, schools, and communities need to work together to facilitate the transition to school.
- ▶ Schools should be engaging environments where families and community members feel welcome. (See the Engaging Environments Pathway.)
- ▶ Engaged community members are key to facilitating transitions and enhancing connections between families and schools. (See the Family, School, and Community Partnerships Pathway.)





## The Work

The work of the Transitions Pathway for the Community-District Team is to a) advocate for early childhood programs and initiatives in the community, b) educate stakeholders on the importance of early care and education, c) support the voices of early childhood professionals around how to best transition their children to school, d) help schools identify all children in the community who need to be registered for Kindergarten, e) provide schools with information on how best to engage the families and community organizations in the transition processes of schools, and f) foster increased community-school/district collaboration and shared leadership. Remember that transitions are not simply from PreK to K, but also include transitions between all grade levels at the elementary school level. It is important to promote a shared understanding and definition of successful transition: what it looks like, prerequisite school characteristics, and community and family involvement and roles.



## Who is Involved: Why and What are Their Roles?

Members of the Community-District Team involved in the transitions process should include representatives from all stakeholder groups. Some possible members are early childhood professionals (private and public), directors of early childhood centers, family members of children birth to 8, K-3 teachers, higher level school and district administrators, business and community organization representatives, and health and social services personnel.



## Sustainability

Wayne County Schools found that if the principal has a background in early childhood education, then there is a better chance of getting support for transitions work at the elementary school level. If the principal does not have this background, the Community-District Team tries to get him/her early childhood education training. Consider connecting with local higher education professionals in early childhood, when available, to provide that key training for district and school leaders. A district-wide professional development program for school leaders provides support for sustainability. An additional resource for principals that districts have found helpful is the following book:

Kostelink, M. J. & Grady, M. L. (2009) *Getting it right from the start: The principal's guide to early childhood education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Ensuring that early childhood professionals feel valued is key to sustaining their participation. There are several steps the Community-District Team can put into place to help with this sustainability.

- ▶ Encourage Kindergarten teachers and principals of elementary schools to visit early childhood care centers to see the actual work of PreK teachers to help overcome the prejudices that early childhood is only about play and, therefore, the rising Kindergarteners are not ready for the academic demands of elementary school.
- ▶ Additionally, early childhood program directors and staff should have opportunities to visit elementary schools so they can see where their children will be going and what they will be doing.
- ▶ Work to find funding for qualified substitutes in the early childhood centers so teachers have the opportunity to participate in professional development and make connections with their counterparts in other centers.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for K and PreK teachers and administrators to meet and discuss the transition process, concerns, and ideas.
- ▶ The Carteret County Community-District Team detailed the importance of making sure there is not too much time lapse between professional development opportunities for early childhood providers. They noted that ideas and initiatives often got lost if there was not follow-up regarding implementation.
- ▶ Another suggestion is to have separate training for child care directors and teachers. If the directors are in attendance, then the teachers may not participate as much.



## **Assessing the Pathway: A Closer Look**

### ***Connecting with Early Childhood Programs***

1. Are there opportunities for Kindergarten teachers and early care and education providers to visit each other's settings?
2. Is there an understanding between Kindergarten teachers and early child care providers that both settings are equally valid and important in the lives of children?
  - » Are both voices equally represented in the transitions conversations?
3. Do early childhood providers feel valued in the roles they play for setting the stage for successful school entry?
4. Do Kindergarten and elementary teachers understand the importance of play for development and learning of very young children?

### ***Collaborating Across the District***

5. Is there a transition plan for students entering Kindergarten that includes the early childhood community?
6. Are there district-wide tools for the transfer of agreed-upon information from early childhood to Kindergarten settings? What types of information are shared?
7. Are there K orientation/induction processes that link with early education and support children and families?
8. Is there a process or procedure for aligning curricula, instruction, and assessment across PreK-3? (See the Effective Curricula Pathway for more on this.)

### ***Recognizing the Role Families Play***

9. Is there a policy demonstrating district buy-in of seamless transitions PreK-3?
10. Is there a plan in place to connect with and include as many families as possible in the transition plan?
11. Are transition and Kindergarten enrollment materials available in all the languages represented in the community?
12. Are translators available during Kindergarten enrollment and transition activities?
13. Are transition activities held in places across the community so all families can participate?



## Taking Action

### Key Strategies

#### Share Information

Many Community-District Teams have a communication tool to share information pertaining to children and their families from early childhood providers to PreK and Kindergarten teachers, but we caution against a generic tool for use by all districts. For this reason, we have provided you with several examples of these tools in Appendix D, Resources for Pathway Three: Transitions. We strongly suggest that your Team spends a considerable amount of time making sure that the tool you use is suitable for your context and community.

- ▶ If academic information (knowledge of letters and numbers) is included, it may send the message to early childhood education providers and families that early education settings should focus on academics and that children should know this information prior to Kindergarten.
- ▶ You may want to include information on children's likes and dislikes, what they enjoy doing at home, who they regularly play with, and whether or not they have attended preschool, in order to help the Kindergarten teacher know more about his/her incoming students.
- ▶ Other benefits to a communication form are that families can sign the form and indicate where their child is registered or plans to register for the upcoming year. This can potentially increase the number of students who register, helping schools more accurately plan for the number of children who will enter Kindergarten. Also, early childhood providers can share information about families with Kindergarten teachers, thus helping to increase the sensitivity among Kindergarten teachers and public school staff.

#### Build Connections

As mentioned earlier, encouraging conversations and connections between families, early childhood professionals, elementary school teachers, and administrators is key to the Transitions Pathway.

Community-District Teams across North Carolina have found ways to build these connections in their districts. For example, Community-District Teams are:

- ▶ Having Kindergarten teachers visit early childhood care centers.
- ▶ Setting up roundtable dialogues where big ideas for improving education for all children are discussed, instead of simply focusing on what early childhood care needs to encompass to "prepare" students for Kindergarten.
- ▶ Having PreK classrooms visit the elementary schools to familiarize them with the school and help them feel more comfortable with their transitions.
- ▶ Starting joint Adult Learning Communities (ALCs) that are collaborations between early childhood care centers and the elementary schools. The ALCs could focus on the big ideas as mentioned above or a book study of a resource around early childhood preparation. One possible book is:
  - » Jacobs, G. & Crowley, K. (2010). *Reaching standards and beyond in Kindergarten: Nurturing children's sense of wonder and joy in learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- ▶ Providing parents with activities that they can do to foster their child's learning and help their child prepare for school.

## Streamline Transition Activities

Schools often have several different transition activities scheduled to introduce families to the school and Kindergarten. Schools will also be the first to tell you that some events are frequented more than others and that there are almost always some children who are not registered for Kindergarten as quickly as they could be. Effective Community-District Teams can serve in an advisory capacity to schools as they are planning transition activities, informing the schools of the best ways to reach the populations of new families and which types of activities (and locations for them) would most appeal to specific audiences. See the Ready Schools in Action box to the right for specific examples from Davidson County and visit Appendix D, Resources for Pathway Three: Transitions for additional Transition resources.



## Issues/Challenges/Barriers

Other issues related to effective transitions are centered on awareness-building and knowledge-gathering. Many can be successfully address with a strong Community-District Team that includes leaders from all the important stakeholder groups. See the Leaders and Leadership Pathway for strategies to strengthen leadership in your Community-District Teams. Some awareness and knowledge issues that may exist in some districts are listed below.

- ▶ Often it is a challenge when PreK programs are not physically located in an elementary school setting because families do not get very involved in the program due to the short duration (often only 1 year) that their children are there.
- ▶ More education is needed for stakeholders about the different early childhood programs that may be operating in the community, such as Smart Start, Head Start, Parents As Teachers, and More at Four.
- ▶ There may be a need to increase understanding of all stakeholders of how cultural diversity and poverty can affect families, schools, and communities.
- ▶ There may be a need for translators for families and teachers in schools and at Kindergarten registration and orientation, as well as the ability to provide all forms, information, and media materials in all languages spoken by members of the community.



### Ready Schools in Action:

#### Connecting with Kindergarten students & families: Davidson County

School and district personnel in Davidson County have redesigned transition activities to provide more opportunities for families and schools to connect. Specific examples of their activities follow.

- 1. Kindergarten Orientation Evening (Spring)** – Families tour the school their child will be attending, participate in child activities, receive information about Kindergarten, and participate in a Q&A session. It is key to invite administration and PreK teachers from feeder preschools.
- 2. Family Education Sessions (Spring or Summer)** – Teachers share basic tools, toys, and ideas to help families prepare children for Kindergarten.
- 3. Eat Lunch at School and Ride the Bus (Spring or Summer)** – The bus ride can be a quick trip around the block and the event can include a brief information session for families who haven't been able to participate in other events.
- 4. Open Playground Event (Summer)** – This is an opportunity for children to meet peers and Kindergarten teachers. It can include brief information sharing for late registering families.

Consider working with local businesses or non-profit organizations to provide food, learning tools, and stipends for staff to participate in these events.



## Strategies for Overcoming Issues/Challenges/Barriers

### Family Fun Day

Hold Family Fun Days with the help of vendors, private organizations, and non-profits. Organize the event to include activities that support attendance, such as story read-alouds, craft activities, and/or door prize drawings. One idea is to have a scavenger hunt to encourage all families visit each of the vendors. Stops on the scavenger hunt can also include Kindergarten registration and "Meet Your Teacher" or "Meet Your Principal." This successful idea from Carteret County is a great way to build community and encourage good family turnout. See Appendix C for Family Fun Day sample documents and visit the Family, School, and Community Partnerships Pathway for more examples of ways to connect with families, local businesses, and community organizations.

### Collaborate with Local Libraries

Chatham County's Community-District Team has found the children's librarian to be an invaluable resource. Together, they have compiled a bibliography of transitions books and encouraged families to explore themes in the books with their children. This idea can be expanded to have local PreK centers checkout the transitions books to read in their centers. The local library could also become an "off-campus" Kindergarten registration site.

### Support Services

Student transportation support services can be provided by a number of individuals including counselors, psychologists, social workers, therapists (e.g., speech, occupational, physical), health care professionals, special educators, remedial educators, classroom teachers, and itinerant teachers. Support service providers should have the knowledge, skills, and cultural competence to work with preschool and school-age children within a culturally sensitive environment. Support services providers should include the perspectives and values of family members and support teachers in helping children make transitions.

**For more resources see Appendix D, Resources for Pathway Three: Transitions at the end of the Toolkit.**



